

## 2. Rotuma as a Hinterland Community

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The island of Rotuma lies about three hundred miles to the north of the Fiji group, on the western fringe of Polynesia. [1] At present there are approximately three thousand Rotumans living on the island, and well over a thousand others reside in Fiji, with which Rotuma has been politically united since its annexation to the Crown in 1881. The island's geographical location places it very near to the intersection of the conventional boundaries of Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia, and traces of influence from each of these areas can be found in the racial composition, language and culture of the people. The bulk of the evidence points to a Polynesian orientation, however, and it may be regarded as an anomaly of history that Rotuma should have become politically united with Fiji, instead of with islands like Samoa, Tonga, Futuna and Wallis, to which a large number of Rotumans can still trace their heritage. Nevertheless, the Rotumans have made a successful adjustment to these circumstances and have managed to become an integral part of the social, economic and political life of the Colony of Fiji.

From the standpoint of an anthropologist interested in the processes of urbanization, the Rotuman population offers an excellent opportunity for research. For one thing, the island is isolated, so that movement of people and goods is not continuous, but dependent upon ships which call at irregular and often widely spaced intervals. This permits an investigator to gain a precise idea of the degree of physical interaction between the island and Fiji. The fact that Rotuma has been treated as a separate administrative district within the Colony is also an advantage, for the excellent government records that have been maintained since Rotuma's application for annexation permit one easily to sort out the relevant documentary data and gain a clear understanding of the historical relationship between the island and the rest of the Colony. Of significance, too, is the fact that the Rotumans are easily distinguishable within Fiji--by language, nomenclature and race and that they form a rather distinct enclave.

### Historical Background

Rotuma was discovered in 1791 by Captain Edward Edwards in H.M.S. Pandora while searching for the mutineers of the Bounty. The vessel, according to the accounts of Captain Edwards and the ship's surgeon, Dr. George Hamilton, was received with considerable suspicion. The Rotumans approached the ship with great caution and were prepared for war, but through constant coaxing with offers of presents and signs of friendliness the crew managed to lure the reluctant natives on board, and negotiated successfully for supplies. [2] Before the 18th century had ended the island was visited by a second European ship, the Duff, but the Rotumans were not eager to trade, and after a minor incident involving an attempted theft by one of the natives, all trading ceased. [3]

The first half of the 19th century was a time of increasing contact with European culture, and the original reluctance to engage in trading gave way to an eagerness for the acquisition of European goods. Whalers found the lush island an excellent station for replenishing their stores, and it became a favourite stopping place. In addition to the whalers there were labour recruiters, who found the Rotumans more than willing to leave their homeland, and scores of young men were transported to

plantations in all parts of the Pacific. Others eagerly signed on board visiting ships as crew members, and sailed to every part of the globe. In addition to these influences, contact with European culture (or at least a highly specialized segment of it) was rendered continuous by the large number of deserters who found their way to Rotuma's hospitable shores.

Soon after the middle of the 19th century missionaries from the Wesleyan and Roman Catholic Churches had established themselves. Unfortunately, the French priests and English ministers were some what less than tolerant towards one another's labours, and a religious factionalism resulted. Each mission marked off its own territorial domain and jealously guarded its converts from the "evil" influences of the other side. An increasing number of disputes arose between adherents of the opposing faiths, often over the question of the right to build churches on communally held land. Antagonisms between the Wesleyans and Catholics continued to mount until 1878, when they culminated in a war between the two sects, in which the Catholics were defeated by the numerically superior Wesleyans.

The unrest which followed this religious war led the paramount chiefs of Rotuma's seven districts to petition to England for annexation, and in 1881 the island was officially ceded to Great Britain. The Crown decided that Rotuma should be administered as a part of the Colony of Fiji--the nearest Crown Colony--rather than as a separate unit. A Resident Commissioner was appointed to govern it along with an advisory body consisting of the seven paramount chiefs. Fortunately for the Rotumans, government under English law had the desired effect of reducing religious conflict, and eventually harmony was restored between the two religious factions. In addition to seeking an alleviation of religious strife, British policy in Rotuma following Cession was directed towards bringing the benefits of civilization to this isolated Polynesian island, and by the end of the 19th century Rotuma was already thoroughly enmeshed in the modern world.

Thus the 19th century for Rotuma was a time of rapid sociocultural change. During that period Rotuman society underwent an extensive transformation from its pre-contact state, though not without a considerable degree of social upheaval. By the beginning of the 20th century, however, this transformation was virtually complete, and the Rotumans had made their adjustment to the alien culture. By that time they had been "Christian" for nearly half-a-century, had engaged in commercial trading for a comparable period of time, and had submitted to English law for nearly twenty years. They wore European clothes, used European tools, and supplemented their native diet with tinned meats, tea, biscuits and innumerable other items of European food. They also paid taxes to the government, applied for marriages and divorces through government offices, sought medical aid from the Resident Commissioner, and sent their children to the mission schools.

That does not mean that the Rotumans simply adopted Western culture uncritically and made no effort to retain their own customs. Rotuma is, in fact, a conservative society even today, and much of the aboriginal culture pattern is still intact. It would be more correct to characterize the nineteenth century as a period of selective cultural borrowing, in which the Rotumans adopted into their society a considerable number of foreign elements, and managed to attain a new and apparently successful integration.

During the 20th century Rotuma has continued to change, but it has changed more as a part of the modern world than as a distinct entity. Although the Rotuman community has retained its unique cultural identity to a considerable degree, socially and economically it has become thoroughly integrated with the rest of the Colony of Fiji. Today Rotuma is in the position of a hinterland community to Fiji's "urban" [\[4\]](#) centres, and particularly the city of Suva, which is the centre of government, commerce and communication for the Colony. Information, goods, money and people continually flow into Suva from all over Fiji and it, in turn, serves as a centre for the dispersal of the commodities that are necessary to maintain modern social life. Besides this primary relationship

with Fiji's capital city, Rotuma also maintains links with other urban centres within the Colony, particularly those that have substantial Rotuman enclaves within them.

In the subsequent sections of this paper we shall examine (1) the flow of population, (2) the flow of goods and money, and (3) the flow of information and ideas, between Fiji's urban areas and Rotuma, and analyze their effects on the Rotuman community.

### **The Flow of Population**

As has already been mentioned, a great many Rotumans emigrated from the island almost as soon as the opportunity was available to them early in the nineteenth century. Most of these emigrants were young men, who returned to their home island after several years of adventure and regaled the community with stories and songs. Even today a number of the Rotuman songs sung in the traditional style refer to the experiences of these early travellers. The tales of adventure told by repatriates quite naturally acted as a stimulus to further emigration, and by the time of Cession the extent of emigration amounted to a social problem, as at this time the decrease in population threatened the race with extinction; and one of the first regulations put into operation on Rotuma, even before Cession formally took place, was a restriction on the emigration of young boys and married men. This did nothing to restrict the emigration of unmarried men, however, and as they were the ones who constituted the majority of the emigrants in the first place, the flow of population to and from the island continued. The disposition of the young men during the years following Cession is reflected in the Annual Report of the Resident Commissioner for the year 1886: [5]

"After inquiring I find that there are not more than 30 adult male Natives on the island that have not been abroad. Large numbers have stayed away many years and wandered to the furthest corners of both hemispheres. It is a cutting reproach to cast at a man that he has not been away from the island; hence, partly, the anxiety of the young men to accomplish their long cherished dream."

Prior to Cession the labour recruiters came directly to Rotuma from all over the Pacific, and Rotumans were employed in such places as the Sandwich Islands and Samoa, but during the very year Cession was effected, Rotuma was closed as a port of entry and labour recruiters ceased to call there. All traffic between Rotuma and the outside world was diverted through Fiji, where a small colony of Rotumans began to develop. The basic pattern during this early period, however, was for emigrants to return to Rotuma after a few years, and therefore the flow of population back to the island nearly balanced the outward flow.

This flow of population between Rotuma and Fiji has continued until the present time, despite various attempts to restrain it by the Rotuman Chiefs and Government Officers, [6] and as a result the Rotuman settlements in Fiji have continued to grow. By 1956, as can be seen in Table 1, nearly one-third of all Rotumans were residing in Fiji.

Today, as has been true since the time of Cession, essentially the only means of transportation to and from Rotuma is by trading boats. Government vessels also call occasionally, but they are restricted to transporting government personnel. With few exceptions the route has been between Suva or Levuka in Fiji and Rotuma. [7] Except during a limited period when government subsidized trading vessels made regular quarterly visits, the number of annual calls has varied according to the prevailing circumstances--in lean years as few as four or five boats would come, while in prosperous years nearly twenty could be expected. In 1960 a total of eighteen ships came to Rotuma. Most of these carried passengers both ways, and although no exact statistics are available, each boat, whether its capacity were thirty passengers or eighty, was usually full going to Suva and often full coming to Rotuma. The number of people who go to Fiji in any given year now seems to be almost entirely

dependent upon the amount of passenger space available, for there are nearly always more applicants for passage than space for them. The flow of population back and forth has been facilitated by the growth of Rotuman colonies in Fiji, which means that virtually everyone in Rotuma has some relative in Fiji with whom he can stay for a time, and vice versa.

The overall growth of Rotuman colonies in Fiji in recent years has been extremely rapid, as can be seen in **Table 1**.

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Table 1A [\[9\]](#)  
Distribution of Rotumans  
in Rotuma and Fiji, 1921-1956

		<u>1921</u>	<u>1936</u>	<u>1946</u>	<u>1956</u>
Rotuma	m	1,052	1,264	1,352	1,474
	f	1,060	1,279	1,392	1519
	T	2,112	2543	2744	2993
Vatukoula	m			95	296
	f			43	223
	T			138	519
Suva	m		48	96	183
	f		62	81	189
	T		110	177	372
Lautoka	m			8	34
	f			3	37
	T			11	71
Levuka	m		6	10	25
	f		7	19	31
	T		13	29	56
Total in urban areas	m		56	218	562
	f		70	151	504

	T		126	369	1066
Total in non-urban Fiji	m		93	126	196
	f		54	74	167
	T		147	200	363
Total in Fiji	m		149	344	758
	f		124	225	671
	T	123	273	569	1429
Total Rotumans	m		1413	1696	2232
	f		1403	1617	2190
	T	2,235	2816	3313	4422

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Of particular interest is the increase of Rotumans residing in urban areas. The jump in percentage from 11.1% in 1946 to 24.1% in 1956 represents the largest increase for any of Fiji's component populations, and makes the Rotumans Fiji's most rapidly urbanizing ethnic group.

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Table  
1B  
Percentages of Rotumans in  
Urban and Non-Urban Areas  
1921 1936 1946 1956

Rotuma	m		89.5	79.7	66.0
	f		91.2	86.1	69.4
	T	94.5	90.3	82.8	67.7
Fiji-urban	m		3.9	12.9	25.2
	f		5.0	9.3	23
	T		4.5	11.1	24.1

Fiji-non-urban	m		6.6	7.4	8.8
	f		3.8	4.6	7.6
	T		5.2	6.1	8.2
Fiji-Total	m		10.5	20.3	34.0
	f		8.8	13.9	30.6
	T	5.5	9.7	17.2	32.3

This increase in the number of Rotumans who reside in Fiji only tells part of the story, however. The Rotumans are a peripatetic people and many of them make frequent trips back and forth between Fiji and Rotuma. The increase in Fiji residents therefore reflects only a residue of the total flow.

A more accurate picture of the transit can be obtained from Tables 2A and 2B, which have been tabulated from residential histories obtained from adults residing in Rotuma during the year 1960. [\[8\]](#)

		Table 2A					
Age Group		Number of Trips					
		<u>1 or less</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5 or more</u>	<u>Total</u>
20-39	males	69	132	9	4	0	247
	%	27.9	53.4	3.6	1.6	0.0	
	females	115	136	5	5	5	292
	%	39.4	46.6	1.7	1.7	1.7	
40+	males	32	85	21	8	16	200
	%	16.0	42.5	10.5	4.0	8.0	
	females	76	73	22	9	4	205
	%	37.1	35.6	10.7	4.4	1.9	
Total		292	426	57	26	25	944
	%	30.9	45.1	6.0	2.7	2.7	

It will be noted in Table 2A that nearly 70% of the sample have been to Fiji at least once, and that 24% have made more than one trip. Table 2B illustrates the fact that a good proportion of the people who make trips away from Rotuma stay away for only a limited period before returning.

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		Table 2B					
		Number of Years Away from Rotuma by Those Who Have Travelled; by Age Group and Sex <a href="#">[10]</a>					
Age Group		Number of Years					<u>Total</u>
		<u>1 or less</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5 or more</u>	
20-39	males	34	29	22	15	54	154
	females	57	29	11	15	35	147
40+	males	35	29	13	13	41	131
	females	41	13	11	2	20	87
Total		167	100	57	45	150	519

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In order to facilitate an understanding of the nature of the flow of population, and the reasons for its existence, I have divided it into two streams; one from Rotuma to Fiji and the other from Fiji to Rotuma.

*(1) The Flow of Population from Rotuma to Fiji*

Perhaps the main stimulus for people leaving Rotuma to settle in Fiji is population pressure. Rotuma is a small island--17.58 square miles in all [\[11\]](#)--and its ability to absorb an increase in population is limited. There are no commercial industries in Rotuma and by far the largest proportion of the inhabitants are dependent upon agriculture for subsistence. The sharp increase in the Rotuman population since 1936, depicted in the following graph, can largely be accounted for by a decreasing death rate, particularly among infants and children.

It can be seen from Figure 1 that while the population of the Rotumans as a whole has increased sharply between 1936 and 1956, the population of Rotuma itself has increased only gradually. This probably reflects the fact that the island is approaching its feasible limits for comfortably maintaining a population that is dependent upon agriculture for subsistence.

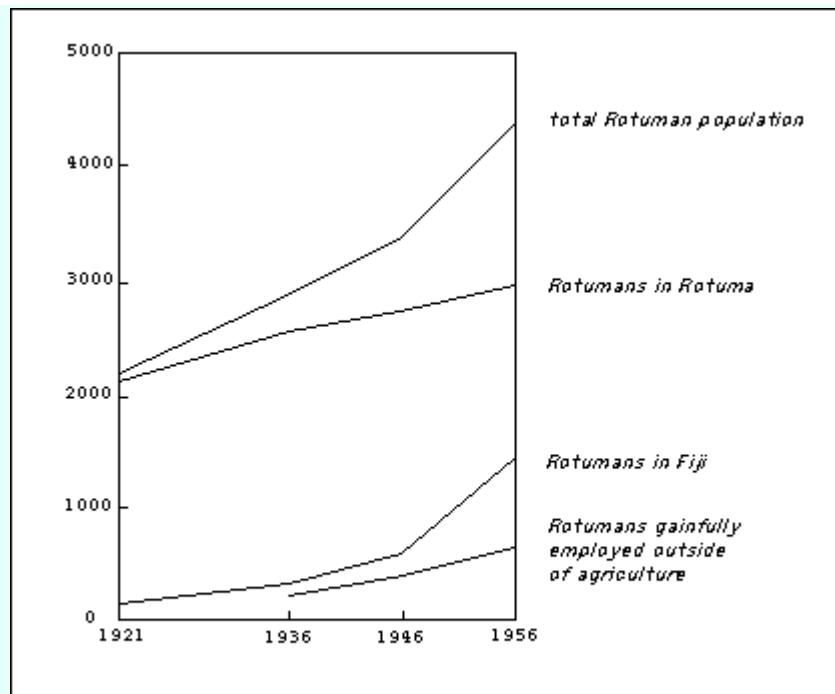


FIGURE 1

On the other hand, the graph shows that the increase of Rotumans in Fiji during the same period almost directly parallels the increase in population as a whole. This would seem to indicate that Fiji has been draining off Rotuma's excess population, and is likely to continue to do so for as long as the Rotumans continue to increase.

The reason for the shift to urban areas is not difficult to understand, since they are centres of employment. The increase in the number of Rotumans gainfully employed in wage-earning occupations between 1936 and 1956, reflected also in Figure 1, demonstrates the tendency for the Rotumans to turn to occupations other than agriculture as a means of subsistence. This shift to wage-earning occupations would not be possible, of course, if the jobs were not available, and therefore the flow is somewhat dependent on general economic conditions in Fiji as a whole. But for the most part the Rotumans have proved to be excellent and reliable workers, and are considered by many employers to be more desirable employees than members of other groups, and they have fared quite well in the competition for jobs.

A second important reason for the migration of Rotumans to Fiji is the desire for social advancement. Many Rotumans would like to pursue a life of comforts, personal luxuries and individual determination. They have been stimulated by education, travel and mass media to covet the image of life as it is lived (or as they suppose it is lived) in Western urban society. But Rotuma itself is a thoroughly conservative community, with extremely tight and effective social controls. Traditionally, prestige can be achieved only by being modest and self-sacrificing, and any efforts of an individual to distinguish himself from the others, or to strive to improve his personal circumstances without concern for his fellows, is met with ridicule and scorn. The usual types of social controls found in most small communities--especially gossip and ridicule--are doubly effective in Rotuma because of the hypersensitive disposition of the people. Then too, besides this extreme pressure for conformity, there are simply very few roles available that provide either substantial monetary rewards or social status.

The main channel for achieving social advancement is through education, but the highest grade taught in Rotuma is Form IV, beyond which a student must go off to Fiji if he wishes to continue. Some parents even send their children to stay with relatives in Fiji as soon as they are of school age,



so that they may attend schools with higher standards than those in Rotuma.

A higher standard of living may also be sought through occupational channels by acquiring special skills, and subsequently obtaining jobs as skilled labour. Both the possibilities for acquiring special skills and the number of roles requiring them is limited in Rotuma, so those seeking these goals must go to Fiji for opportunities.

These two reasons--over-population and the desire for social advancement--account for the increase of Rotumans who go to reside in Fiji, but there are other factors which lead people to make temporary visits.

One of the most common reasons for temporary visits to Fiji is for special occasions, such as weddings and the birth of children. These visits sometimes are the source of conflict between conservative Rotumans from the home island and their urbanized kin. The following incident, which is not at all atypical, illustrates this point:

The daughter of an elderly Rotuman man was staying in Fiji where she was successfully employed. When she announced her engagement to a young Rotuman lad who was also employed in Fiji, her father decided to make a trip to Fiji with his wife to arrange for the wedding. He made his intentions known to his son who was residing in an urban area in Fiji and who held a responsible position. His son, however, urged him not to make the trip, as he could arrange everything himself and the trip would simply amount to an additional expense. Undaunted, the parents left Rotuma and came to stay at their son's home. The problem arose when it came time to discuss the type of wedding reception that was to be held. The father was anxious to have a large Rotuman type feast, with all the relatives and friends invited, and provisions for anyone else who might decide to come. This would necessitate a rather large expenditure, for pigs, which are kept for ceremonial purposes in Rotuma, would have to be purchased in Fiji, as would numerous other provisions. The father wanted to be sure that there would be plenty of food, because if there were a shortage the whole affair would be ridiculed. The son, on the other hand, wanted to make a small European style reception, with close relatives and intimate friends, intending to keep expenses within his means. He could not persuade his father, the old man went ahead with the arrangements for the feast, and the reception was done in the Rotuman fashion. Because the father did not have sufficient funds to cover expenses, the financial burden naturally fell on the young man, whose plans for the future material welfare of his own family suffered a setback.

Visits to relatives and friends in Fiji may also be stimulated by events in Rotuma. A family quarrel, for example, may result in one party, or a whole family, deciding to pack up and leave their established home. In such circumstances a new home must be sought, and any reasonably close relatives may be considered fair game. In the past, alternatives would have been limited to other parts of Rotuma, but nowadays Fiji is within the range of potential choice.

Then, too, visits may be motivated simply by the desire to see close relatives and friends who have not been seen for some time.

A further reason for people leaving Rotuma temporarily for Fiji is to seek medical aid. The Rotumans are fortunate enough to have a well equipped hospital and dispensary, but there is only one assistant medical officer and a small staff of nurses in attendance. It is therefore unpracticable to perform difficult operations, and specialized aid is unavailable. Also, there was no X-ray equipment on the island up until the end of 1960, and those people who were suspected tuberculosis patients had to go to Suva for diagnosis. People are also obliged to go to Suva for dental and optical

treatment, as facilities for such treatment are not available in Rotuma. It is of significance to note that even though such treatment may take only a matter of a few days the patient is forced to remain in Fiji until another boat is available to return him to Rotuma, which at times may not be for several months.

Yet another interesting reason for married individuals leaving the island for limited periods is as a technique for contraception. The Rotumans have a high fertility rate and as yet knowledge of contraceptive techniques is not widespread. Children are welcome up to a degree, and adoption provides a method of distributing children from those who have too many to those who have too few, but women sometimes express the desire "to have a rest", and either a woman or her husband may depart for Fiji. These separations sometimes last for several years, and they may become permanent should one or the other of the parties get tired of "resting" while they are still parted.

Finally, there is the eternal factor of human curiosity, the desire to see new things and have new experiences. This cannot be underestimated in the case of the Rotumans. They are romantically inclined, and just as in the earliest days of contact, when returned sailors entranced their friends and relatives with stories of far-away lands a returned traveller is never at a loss for a willing audience.

Those who regard the "urban drift" with some misgivings may suggest that the desire to roam is largely a consequence of discontent brought about by social disruptions, and that if these conditions could be alleviated the drift would stop. It was a popular theory among the early Resident Commissioners in Rotuma, for example, that the restrictions imposed by the missions were to blame. While such explanations probably have a certain degree of credibility, they ignore the innate love of wandering that seems to be characteristic of the Polynesians--a motivation that has undoubtedly been with them since the first of their ancestors bid farewell to the continent of Asia. Thus George Bennett who visited Rotuma in 1830, before the first missionaries had set foot on the island, wrote of the Rotumans: [\[12\]](#)

"An innate love of roaming seems to exist among these people; they set sail without any fixed purpose in one of their large canoes: few ever return, some probably perish, others drift on islands either uninhabited, or if inhabited, they mingle with the natives, and tend to produce those varieties of the human race which are so observable in the Polynesian Archipelago. I frequently asked those of Rotuma what object they had in leaving their fertile island to risk the perils of the deep? The reply was, 'Rotuma man want to see new land': they thus run before the wind until they fall in with some island, or perish in a storm."

The young people--those who have not yet travelled--are particularly eager. The young men dream of sailing on one of the overseas boats out of Fiji to England, America and Australia; and the unmarried girls are motivated to go to Fiji where they can enjoy considerably more freedom in the more impersonal, and therefore less restrictive, environment of urban areas.

## (2) The Flow of Population from Fiji to Rotuma

Whenever an individual who is in charge of a land-holding leaves Rotuma he runs the risk of losing his land. The reason for this is that the ownership of land in Rotuma is invested in the bilateral kindred, or **kainaga**, and the person who is placed in charge--the **pure**--is only an owner-in-trust. If he leaves the land, all the people who can claim rights in the land should theoretically meet and select a new **pure**. To protect himself from this eventuality it is common for a **pure** who wishes to leave the island to summon a younger brother, or someone else over whom he has rights, to take over temporary possession. In this way he can be assured of regaining control of the land when, and if, he returns to the island. Since most of the appropriate substitutes on the island are likely to be

established on other land already it is not unusual for the pure to summon someone who is in Fiji to return.

In other cases, where there are a number of brothers of working age, some may go to Fiji while others stay and help on their father's land, and it is common practice for them to rotate the responsibility, each taking his turn to work on the land after spending a time in Fiji.

A second group of migrants to Rotuma are those who go to assume jobs requiring special skills--skills which can only be acquired in places other than Rotuma. Teachers, meteorologists, medical personnel, etc., fall into this category. For the most part they are Rotumans who return to the island, having been trained away, but members of other ethnic groups are also involved. Many of these people serve only a limited period on Rotuma and then are reassigned to other parts of the Colony, so that there is a constant changeover of personnel.

Many Rotumans also return to the island each year to visit relatives and take a holiday. For the most part these visits are short, lasting from one boat to the next. Quite often these holiday trips are used by the young people as a pretext for mate-hunting. Rotumans do not freely inter-marry with either of Fiji's main ethnic groups, the Fijians and Indians, and therefore Rotuma still constitutes the primary "marriage market". Christmas is a particularly strong stimulus for young men and women to go, for that is the time of **manea**, or the "play" period, which is a time of license for the young unmarrieds, and is therefore a good time for meeting potential spouses.

Lastly, people are constantly returning to the island because they have failed to find a place for themselves in Fiji. Scholars who fail to make the grade, men who lose their jobs or who get too old to support themselves, and young girls who become pregnant without being married, can all find sanctuary in Rotuma. Strong pressures may also be put on young boys who become troublemakers, by their family and the leaders of Rotuman communities in Fiji, to make them return to Rotuma, where social controls are more effective and where they are less likely to give the Rotumans a bad name.

We have, in summary, an example of an agricultural community producing a surplus of population with which it is feeding the rapidly growing urban centres in Fiji. These centres, in return, provide a training ground and field of economic and social opportunity. Rotumans who so desire can go there to try their luck. If they succeed they may themselves become a part of the urban multitude. If they fail, they can return to the sanctuary of their island and still lead useful, though restricted, lives.

### **The Flow of Goods and the Money Economy**

As far as can be ascertained from early records and the stories of elderly informants, the pre-contact Rotuman economy consisted of a subsistence agriculture, supplemented by fishing and animal husbandry (the keeping of pigs and chickens), and a system of ceremonial exchange. For subsistence the Rotumans depended mainly upon the characteristic Polynesian root crops--taro and yams--supplemented by fruits and sea-food. Pigs and fowl, though sometimes used as a food staple, were usually reserved for ceremonial occasions. On such occasions the men prepared the animals as sacrificial food offerings in an earthen oven, or **koua**, and used them as a medium for ceremonial exchange. The women used mats for a similar purpose. These commodities were exchanged most abundantly during life-crisis ceremonies, but they were also used as a means of apologizing for wrongs and as a technique for expressing gratitude.

There was little opportunity for extensive trade relations with other islands, and though some contacts were almost certainly maintained, the economy of the island was essentially a closed system. It was the arrival of European vessels that opened the system up, and paved the way for

Rotuma's current participation in the world economy. The early visitors needed supplies, and exchanged for them such items as metal tools and cloth. The Rotumans soon came to value European goods to a considerable extent, and trade with visiting ships flourished.

Probably sometime between 1860 and 1870 the first commercial traders established themselves in Rotuma, [13] and in all probability the island's first commercial product was coconut oil. It was not long, however, before the copra trade sprang up, and by 1875 copra had replaced coconut oil as Rotuma's chief export. A small kava trade also flourished about this time. [14] In 1881--the year of Cession--Rotuma exported 446.5 tons of copra, 2 tons of coconuts, 104 gallons of coconut oil and 3 tons of kava; amounting to an estimated export value of £2,800. Imports for the same year were valued at £2,076, and included tools, clothing, food and sundry other articles of civilization. [15]

In the years following Cession the administration did what it could to foster the growth of trade. For their part the Rotumans proved to be keen businessmen and showed an appreciation for the value of money. One early Resident Commissioner wrote of their shrewdness with regard to such affairs: [16]

"... the Rotuman, unlike any other native of these islands, likes to have money put by for an emergency, the result, I presume, of notions imbibed from a closer contact with his white brother. That there were considerable sums put by during the prosperous seasons there can be no doubt. The traders are fully aware of this. The Rotuman, too, will not trouble himself to turn his coconuts into copra below a certain price; if the price does not suit him he rears pigs which always command a large money price on the island. Hence it is that the trader finds himself obliged to give such a high price for copra, depending on the profit of his goods for income."

Rotuma's main export and source of income since Cession has been copra. As the market for coconut oil and kava dropped away it became, in fact, the island's only source of income. Various attempts have been made through the years to introduce secondary crops such as cocoa, coffee, rubber and tobacco, but so far none has met with success. There have been no difficulties in getting these crops to yield, but apparently Rotuman temperament is averse to the kind of careful handling and processing that is necessary for their commercial export. Were Rotuma closer to Fiji's markets it could profitably export such perishable commodities as bananas, oranges and other surplus foods, but the problem of lengthy storage and the high cost of transport renders such a trade impractical.

Nevertheless, Rotuma is a prosperous island. Except during periods when the copra market fell badly, as it did during the Great Depression of the 30's, the Rotumans have always had access to an abundance of goods. The average income per family now ranges somewhere between £100 and £200 annually, and since subsistence expenses are low, most people have plenty of money to spend on clothes, household articles, food luxuries, improvements to their houses, or whatever else may take their fancy.

Rotuma's subsistence economy itself has not been changed drastically by the addition of the commercial economy, except perhaps for the addition of money as a medium for exchange. But access to European products over a span of nearly two centuries has completely altered the standard of living of the indigenous people and has resulted in Rotuma's overall economy becoming inextricably tied to that of Fiji. Many European products are now considered to be absolute necessities rather than luxuries, and if Rotuma were cut off from them for an extended period of time, it would suffer as much as most communities in rural Europe would suffer under comparable conditions. To obtain such commodities requires money, and to obtain money most Rotumans must cut copra, which is sent to Fiji. The result is an economic dependence on the urban commercial market.

This economic dependence on commercial exports has many ramifications for life in Rotuma. For one thing, fluctuations in the price of copra (a consequence of world market conditions) touch upon many areas of Rotuman life by affecting the amount of money that is available. Expensive Rotuman-style weddings, for example, may be deferred or even completely eliminated in times when a low copra price makes money scarce. Also, since the prices of manufactured goods remain more or less stable, a fall in the price of copra must be compensated for by an increase in production if the same standard of living is to be maintained; or men may decide to delay cutting their copra in the hope that the price will rise in the following weeks. In this way the price of copra, though it is determined by factors completely external to Rotuma, affects the daily routine of the people.

It is also worthy of note that most of the economic policy-making decisions that affect Rotuma are made in Suva. Thus a man seeking credit at one of the firm branches may be told by the local manager that certain limits must be imposed, "not because I don't trust you, but because the head office in Suva won't permit it". One also is made to feel a sense of economic dependence when an order for needed goods or equipment is "fouled up" in Suva so that the wrong items, or imperfect ones, are sent. When the next boat may not be for several months such an incident can cause considerable inconvenience. The wrong sized part to a motorcycle or a bad tube for a radio can produce an incredible feeling of frustration under such circumstances.

The feelings of helplessness that are aroused by circumstances such as these have led the Rotumans to regard the firms with suspicion, and on numerous occasions they have expressed open resentment. The ordinary people, finding it difficult to understand world markets and their fluctuations, and being used to reaching agreements on a highly personal level in contrast to the impersonal "policies" of the firms, have on such occasions protested against what seemed to them to be a totally arbitrary system. There were times, of course, when they correctly diagnosed exploitive techniques employed by some of the less scrupulous of the traders, but much of the time their discontent simply signalled an inability to grasp the working of the system, and a feeling of frustration arising out of a felt lack of control.

The advent of the government-sponsored co-operative movement following World War II has to some degree alleviated the situation and has projected the Rotuman economy into a new phase. Prior to 1947 the business of the island was carried out exclusively by two or three established firms and a few independent traders. The people themselves were merely customers. Now, with the co-operative movement firmly entrenched on the island and handling the bulk of the business, each member has become an integral part of a business organization, and is gaining both an understanding of business affairs and a sense of mastery. There are at present twelve local co-operative societies on Rotuma, which are federated into one large unit--the Rotuma Co-operative Association. Each of these groups, including the R.C.A., is registered under the Registrar of Co-operative Societies in Suva, whose responsibility it is to advise and aid the societies as to proper and productive management,

It is perhaps diagnostic of the Rotuman attitude that they have federated the local societies into a single large unit which controls policy, sometimes even in contradiction of policy and advice formulated for them at the Registrar's office in Suva. In this way administration of the co-ops has gravitated into the hands of a few educated and trusted Rotumans. What is important to the people is that they are Rotumans and that they are living in Rotuma. This may be understood as a means of trying to recapture a sense of control over their own economic destiny.

This broadening of the base of economic responsibility, which is one of the primary goals of the co-operative movement, has in no way weakened the knot of economic affiliation that exists between Rotuma and Fiji. Rather it has helped to place the interaction on a more extensive and democratic basis, through wider participation in economic affairs.



Another important consideration is the part played by the government in maintaining economic interaction between Rotuma and Fiji. The government collects taxes, licenses, court fees, fines for offenses, etc. Revenues collected from these sources are reported to the administration in Suva along with accounts of expenditure. From these data higher officials in the capital city determine Rotuma's administrative budget. Even projects conceived by the Rotuma Council of Chiefs involving expenditures from the Rotuma Development Fund--a fund initiated by the Rotumans for the purpose of improving living conditions on the island--must be approved by higher officials in Fiji. In addition to these economic activities the government maintains a savings bank into which Rotumans may deposit funds at a specified rate of interest.

A further aspect of the economic interdependence between Rotuma and Fiji centres around the exchange of goods and money between kinsmen and friends. It is quite common, for example, for relatives in Fiji who are earning a good wage to send money to Rotuma for special occasions, or simply to help their family. Husbands or sons may even do this on a regular basis, sometimes sending a weekly sum by telegraph. Goods, such as furniture, clothes and personal effects are also sent to Rotuma by successful urban residents, and proud is the son or daughter who, upon returning, can provide his parents with the funds for a new iron roof on their home.

Goods and money are also sent from people in Rotuma to those in Fiji. Every boat returning from the island carries baskets of oranges and other fruit for delivery to relatives and friends, as well as a complement of pigs and fowl for the ultimate benefit of guests at a prospective wedding or other festive occasion. Then, too, many a Rotuman who has failed to succeed in Fiji has resorted to sending for passage money home, obliging his relatives there to go into the bush and cut the necessary copra.

One other economic tie is worthy of mention. The Rotumans are regularly asked to donate funds for various purposes--some of which have little or no bearing on their immediate welfare. The Methodist mission, for example, collects funds amounting to several hundred pounds annually. Only one-third of the funds collected go towards direct support of the Rotuma circuit; the rest are used by the mission to maintain the larger organizational structure of which Rotuma is a part. Similarly, when a new school in Fiji is contemplated by the Catholic mission, the Catholics in Rotuma may be asked to donate towards its construction, either directly or by means of bazaars and dances. In addition, the Rotumans have always responded generously to appeals for funds by the Red Cross and other charities, especially during and following the two world wars, contributing hundreds of pounds each time they have been called upon to help.

In summary, Rotuma produces a specialized crop--copra, which it sells on the Fiji market. In return Fijian currency is received and used for the purchase of goods. Money and goods are also exchanged between friends and relatives in Fiji and Rotuma; and the government fosters economic interaction through its administrative functions and concern for the welfare of the Rotuman people. Finally, the Rotumans support charities for the benefit of people in all parts of the world.

### **The Flow of Information and Ideas**

There are three main channels of communication between Rotuma and Fiji: personal contacts, mail, and a wireless service.

Personal contacts are perhaps the most effective means of acquiring information and disseminating ideas. Many visits by government officials are made specifically for this purpose. The Commissioner Eastern, for example, under whose jurisdiction Rotuma falls, [\[17\]](#) visits Rotuma occasionally in order to ascertain the state of affairs there, and possibly to help the District Officer solve difficult problems. Many of these calls are routine inspection visits; others may be provoked

by important problems or domestic crises. Since officers of the administration in Fiji must rely upon mail and telegraphic communiqués for much of their knowledge of affairs in Rotuma, the picture they get is apt to be largely coloured by the views of the District Officer, who is their main source of information. A trip to Rotuma by a higher official, permitting him to size up things for himself, is an important corrective measure. When important decisions are at stake such an official may hold a series of meetings around Rotuma at which anyone can express his views; and after an important policy decision has been made, a higher official may visit the island with the task of explaining matters to the Rotuma Council of Chiefs. This not only serves the function of making sure that things are explained clearly and are properly understood, but also lends added weight to their authority.

Government officials from specialized agencies also make trips to Rotuma for similar purposes. Agricultural experts, for example, may visit Rotuma to investigate the copra production, or the possibility of introducing secondary crops. After careful examination of the methods employed by the Rotumans, the condition of the soil and the type of plants already under cultivation, they make official reports and specify recommendations. Their recommendations are then communicated to the District Officer, who reports them to the Rotuma Council of Chiefs. The Chiefs are supposed, in turn, to disseminate the relevant information to the people in their respective districts. While I was in Rotuma an agricultural field officer, a Rotuman by birth, was dispatched to the island to implement a programme designed to improve the quality and production of crops. This was not a new thing, however, such work having been carried on from time to time in previous years. Education officers and inspectors from the Department of Co-operative Societies also make occasional visits in order to attend to their special interests.

These visits by government officials play an extremely important role in maintaining Rotuma's affiliation with Fiji. In addition to the obvious utilitarian functions of gathering information and explaining policies to the people, the visits give the Rotumans a much greater sense of association than they might otherwise have. It is easy to gain the feeling on such an isolated island that the District Officer is a man of supreme authority, and indeed he has extraordinary power by virtue of his isolation. The visits of higher officials and departmental officers do much to convey the understanding that Rotuma is administratively bound to Fiji, and that even the District Officer is responsible to the central authorities.

In addition to the visits of government personnel, representatives of other interests come to Rotuma to tend to their special affairs. The Bishop of Fiji, whose office is in Suva, makes occasional trips to inspect the Catholic schools and the affairs of the mission. He also attends to those matters that require the participation of a man of his rank, such as the Confirmation of the faithful. The Chairman of the Methodist Mission, and the Divisional Superintendent of the Vanua Levu/Rotuma Division, visit Rotuma from time to time and thus create a link with the larger organization. Also, inspectors for the business firms make annual trips to audit the accounts of the Rotuma branches, and report upon the conditions of business operations.

Travel to Fiji by personnel stationed in Rotuma is also undertaken for the purpose of acquiring information and communicating ideas. Government personnel, for example, such as policemen and medical workers, are sometimes sent back to Suva for additional training. Officers of the local co-operatives may go to attend special courses of instruction sponsored by the Registrar in Suva; and the Superintendent Minister of the Rotuma Circuit attends an annual synod in Fiji.

Another form of personal contact is made possible by the replacement of persons in positions of responsibility--including government officers, ministers and priests, medical officers, nurses, the managers of business firms, and teachers. Since most of these people have been trained in urban areas either in Fiji or overseas (such as in New Zealand or Australia) they can all be considered

potential agents of urbanization. Indeed the very nature of their jobs includes the dissemination of information pertinent to their respective fields. Government officials keep the people informed about the desires of the administration in Suva, and endeavour to educate them as to the purposes and functions of the government. They may also undertake, sometimes on their own initiative, to teach the people something which they believe to be to the island's benefit. An attempt was made by a recent District Officer, [18] for example, to introduce modern methods of contraception by explaining their nature and use.

The ministers and priests [19] contribute to the flow of ideas by introducing church activities that are popular in Western society. The Methodist Church, to cite an example, has youth clubs which meet regularly. The members have learned to play games like ping-pong, checkers (draughts) and various card games, and in one case have been taught to sing American folk spirituals by an educated catechist. The Catholic Churches hold bazaars, bingo games and European dances in order to raise money and entertain the people. At one of the mission compounds an old pool table was being renovated for use by the local youths, and by now some sharp-eyed lads are probably putting the eight-ball in the corner pocket with remarkable consistency.

Medical personnel are shouldered with the responsibility of educating the people in subjects like sanitation, personal hygiene, diet, care of children and the proper treatment of patients. The Assistant Medical Officer holds a weekly ante-natal clinic at the dispensary on the government station in which he not only examines expectant mothers, but advises them about proper care as well. The nurses hold child welfare clinics in each district and meet with mothers to answer their questions and to explain proper child care. They may even advise mothers about psychological matters, such as the dangers of spoiling children by over-indulgence. Medical and sanitation information is also disseminated by means of pamphlets published in Suva in the Rotuman language.

The managers of business firms are storehouses of information on business affairs. It is mainly from them that news of business trends in Fiji reaches interested parties, and they act as informal advisors to those who seek their advice. They are also the leaders of the small "European" clique [20] in Rotuma, and their houses are the scenes of occasional cocktail parties and European-style dancing. During the 1930's Rotuma's European clique maintained a full-fledged country club, complete with a nine-hole golf course, and according to accounts some of the Rotuman chiefs became quite adept at the game. The country club no longer exists, and the golf course has long been replaced by copra drying racks and storage sheds; but some of the social activities still persist, and are a focal point for Rotuman curiosity about European ways.

The teachers, perhaps more than any of the others, are concerned with the transmission of "modern" ideas. One of the Rotuman teachers on the island, a woman, answered the question, "Why did you become a teacher?" on a questionnaire which I circulated in the following methodical way:

"I would like the children to achieve from my teaching all the requirements for the welfare and happiness of the Rotumans, e.g.:

- a. The enjoyment of good health. That is why I teach Hygiene & Mother Craft.
- b. Ability and opportunity to earn a living. Gardening, Native Craft, Agricultural, Sewing, Cooking, Woodwork, etc., help the children to earn a living.
- c. Opportunity to enjoy satisfactory social relations. I teach them English so that they can talk to Non-Rotumans in that language. Co-education helps both boys and girls to have a better attitude towards one another; "Houses" (team divisions) in Sports and well



supervised concerts are good. History & Geography help the children to adapt themselves to changing conditions.

d. Opportunity to exercise Political rights. History, Civics, Debates, Groups may fit the children for democracy.

e. Freedom to enjoy leisure. Reading, Handwork, Sewing, Gardening, Fishing, etc., lead to good leisure occupations."

In addition to these "progressive" aims she added the following "conservative" clause:

"f. Freedom to enjoy religious exercises (A high standard of Character). So far I have not known many Rotumans who are Non-Christians that have outstanding characters. [\[21\]](#) Apart from Religious instructions, Native Custom is taught by an Expert for Rotuman Character training."

Although she does not personally teach all of these subjects her reply ably sums up the goals expressed by her colleagues.

Finally, and perhaps most important, are the informal contacts: the men and women who return to the island after spending several years in Fiji bring new ideas into the households of the majority of the people when they come to stay with their less exposed kin. The introduction of sewing to the women (with or without a machine) and methods of cooking are two outstanding examples. Many of the women are now quite expert at sewing their own clothes or at baking a birthday cake. The celebration of children's birthdays itself, in fact, is an idea introduced in this way. Stylistic ideas of all sorts are brought to Rotuma by returned kin--styles regarding clothes, furniture, house types, etc. Leisure activities may also be introduced in this way. One small group holds a regular poker night; another plays canasta. The significance of these informal contacts is hard to overestimate. It is they that possibly more than any other source result in a changing mood--leading to an awareness of urban ways; and in the long run they may have the deciding influence as to the direction of culture change in Rotuma.

In addition to transmitting information about urban ways, informal contacts are used as a technique for communicating casual information about events and circumstances involving Rotumans. This works both ways--the visitor to Rotuma relating all the gossip about who did what to whom in Suva and how so-and-so lost his job at the gold mines; and the newly arrived visitor to Fiji relating news of comparable interest about the goings-on in Rotuma.

The other channels of two-way communication are the mail and wireless. Mail is delivered and picked up by each vessel calling on Rotuma, and it is processed at the local post office. In 1960 some 106 bags of mail were delivered to the island and 21 bags were taken to Fiji. This imbalance in the flow of mail--fully five times as much coming in as going out can be accounted for mainly by the inflow of magazines, newspapers and pamphlets. They constitute a major source of news about the outside world for people living in Rotuma. Most of them are received by the few well educated persons, who disseminate the news to their less literate friends, who in turn spread it around the island. Quite understandably such information is often exaggerated or misinterpreted to suit the special interests of the people. For instance, a French priest wrote into his diary for the year 1940: [\[22\]](#)

"Defeat of France and the signature of the armistice of the 24th of June. A tremendous surprise to the Europeans. One of them spoke badly of France and soon the Wesleyans began rejoicing and announcing everywhere the defeat of France, not understanding anything of this very complicated situation."

Much of the mail, however, is personal correspondence between friends and relatives, exchanging the mundane news of everyday life.

A wireless installation was inaugurated in 1933 and maintains daily contact with Suva. It includes both a telegraph and a radio-telephone service, permitting intimate and extensive communication between the two points. These services also enable rapid transmission of information and are used to convey messages of arrivals and departures, births and deaths and requests for money and goods. Government personnel, missionaries and business managers also use them to communicate information and requests, and to receive orders and advice. In addition, the telegraph is used to transmit meteorological data to Suva.

Two other forms of communication are of significance for the community--short-wave radio (there being 28 such sets registered on the island in 1960) and motion pictures. I vividly remember spending one afternoon huddled around the short-wave set listening to the second championship fight between Floyd Patterson and Ingemar Johansson. Before the fight there was much speculation as to who would win and why. Several people made small wagers; the more sophisticated ones on the basis of betting odds. During the bout there was considerable excitement, including shouts in Rotuman and English urging one or the other of the fighters on. Patterson's victory that day in far off America sent some Rotumans home elated, while others were visibly disappointed. Before an hour's time almost everyone on the island knew the result of the fight and the more interested ones spent hours analyzing it, providing their share of second guesses. On a day-to-day basis the most popular station is the one operated by the Fiji Broadcasting Commission in Suva, which broadcasts news of the Colony, including the eagerly awaited copra prices, and island music.

Motion pictures, shown weekly at three places on the island, have some influence, particularly on the younger set. The films are well attended, and probably partly because of language difficulties, action pictures are most highly appreciated. One performance, consisting of all twelve chapters of an antique serial featuring a character called "Rocket Man", attracted over 500 persons. The effect of the films are difficult to sort out from other sources of influence, but Hollywood hair styles among a certain group of boys testify to their having at least made some impression.

Thus far we have discussed only those influences which come from "European" Fiji. It is important to point out that numerous effects of acculturation with Fijian Fiji can also be detected in Rotuma. A large number of Rotuman adults speak fluent Fijian, even though they may know little or no English. Many of them are, however, tri-lingual. Fijian songs are known and sung, and a small group of men have taken to social **kava** drinking. [23] The only concrete evidence of Indian influence that I was able to detect is the use of curry powder as a condiment.

To summarize: information and ideas flow back and forth between Rotuma and Fiji through three channels--personal contacts, mail and the wireless. Much of the communication is between relatives and friends about events and circumstances of everyday existence, but a certain proportion involves information essential for decision-making and policy formation. The general pattern with regard to the latter is for circumstantial information to be forwarded from Rotuma to Suva where policies are determined in higher offices, and for directives and advice to be communicated to the appropriate persons in Rotuma for carrying them out. Mass media, including written literature, short wave radio and motion pictures, constitute a one-way flow into the community and are also responsible for introducing information and new ideas. In addition to influences from Western European culture, acculturative influences from Fiji's indigenous population can be detected on the island.

But lest the reader gain the wrong impression it should be made clear that the flow of information and ideas, like the flow of population, money and goods, is not continuous and unrestrained. It comes in a flood when a boat arrives, but during the intervals it flows slowly, in small capsules. One

certainly is not subjected to the continuous bombardment of aural and written stimuli that strikes the urban dweller every day. Then, too, most Rotumans on the island ignore a great proportion of the news that might be of interest to other people. Except for news of monumental significance, most of them pay little or no attention to world affairs, or even to political and economic events in Fiji, unless, of course, someone points out how it may affect them.

### **The Effects of Urban Affiliation**

Urban areas, as centres for the dispersal of the commodities of modern life, are also centres of culture change, and although change is most rapid in the cities and towns themselves, hinterland regions like Rotuma are also affected. The stream of new people, new goods and new ideas which flow into the island requires a constant re-adjustment of the social system. Thus in Rotuma, along with the rest of the world change has become the norm.

Most easily absorbed are those things, such as material items, that raise the standard of living. A high standard of living and material well-being is the one thing, in fact, that all Rotumans, conservative and radical alike, are able to agree about. For the most part material items are incorporated into the culture without causing radical changes, but some do have profound effects. The advent of the motorcar is a case in point. Prior to its introduction in the early 1920's the chief means of transporting copra was by launch and horseback. Considerable effort and inconvenience was involved both for the people and the traders. The use of lorries to pick up copra at various points around the island, no longer necessitating it to be carried by launch or pony to a central station, resulted in an increase in copra production and hence, an increase in the standard of living.

Many new roles have been generated in Rotuma by the necessity for maintaining successful interaction with Fiji. When Great Britain annexed the island to the British Empire it assumed responsibility not only for governing the island, but also for promoting the welfare of the people. This meant seeing to it that the people's health needs were taken care of and their children educated. In addition, for the island to prosper, successful business relations had to be maintained with Fiji. The need for acquiring trained personnel--medical officers, nurses, senior clerks, teachers and policemen--was obvious from the very beginning; but since Rotuma had no facilities for training them, they had to be obtained from Fiji. Bringing in trained Fijians, however, was not a very satisfactory solution because they would have to learn a new language and adjust to a new culture. Besides, Fiji itself was in desperate want of trained personnel, needed to serve a far greater population. The only plausible solution was to send promising young Rotumans to Fiji where they could receive proper training. This was done and before long a steady stream of young men and women were being sent to Fiji to be trained in various fields. At present there are far more qualified Rotumans than can possibly be absorbed into the island's social system, and they serve in communities all over the Colony.

The Rotumans who did return to fill the available positions formed the nucleus of a new elite. Their special skills, including a command of English; their comparatively high salaries; and their knowledge of European ways, gained from extended residence in urban areas, all tended to bestow upon them high prestige.

In addition to these specially trained individuals a second group of potential leaders has emerged. They are people who, though not specially trained, have a fair amount of education and a basic knowledge of European ways. It is they who take jobs as minor clerks, truck drivers, skilled and semi-skilled workers. The talent required to keep the co-operative societies running has been drawn mainly from this group. Each local society has a chairman, treasurer, secretary and storekeeper. These, plus the comparable roles for the Rotuma Co-operative Association, add up to over fifty positions of responsibility to be filled by such individuals. In addition there is room for several

carpenters and mechanics.

This emergent elite contrasts markedly in character with the hereditary Chiefs, who are traditional leaders. In order to be successful at their jobs the emergent leaders must be assertive. They must be punctual when punctuality is called for, and they must be capable of making decisions and accepting responsibility. On the other hand, Chiefs are selected on the basis of their approaching the Rotuman ideal of "a good man". [24] The good man is essentially one who is unselfish and generous. He should not speak badly of others nor should he be proud and make a show of his possessions or knowledge. As a Chief he should listen to the people and try to make them happy. He should never make harsh demands upon them, but is expected to "love" them. In other words, to be considered a good man one must never assert himself.

Such men, as Chiefs, tend to be conservative and ineffectual leaders. They are usually indecisive and susceptible to persuasion from any source, and as a general rule the prestige of a Chief declines in proportion to the number of decisions he has to make.

The contrast between the emergent leaders and the traditional Chiefs is nowhere more apparent than at district meetings, over which the Chiefs preside. To conservative Rotumans it would be considered presumptuous for a man of common rank to argue a point at a district meeting, and great caution is lent even to making a simple proposal. The matter is made even more complicated by the desire of the Chief to make a popular decision. Reaching a decision on a matter that affects the community is therefore invariably a delicate affair for Rotumans. Only under the best conditions do a sufficient number of people commit themselves well enough to permit an indubitably popular decision. But nowadays the meetings are often dominated by one of the new elite, who, not feeling the humility of the conservative Rotumans freely expresses his views and supports them with argument. In the face of such conviction the others may withhold their true feelings and the debater wins by default. Not until the informal channels of communication have had their chance to work themselves out subsequent to the meeting can it be known whether or not the decision is an acceptable one, and it is not uncommon for decisions made at one meeting to be reversed at the next.

Upon the basis of these facts alone one might expect that a natural line of cleavage would exist between the emergent leaders and the Chiefs over the matter of radicalism vs. conservatism. Such is not the case at all, however, although certain areas of conflict do exist for some of the more progressive of the new elite. Perhaps the main area of conflict is that of social prerogatives. Some ex-urbanites have become used to such activities as beer parties, mixed socials and casual dating--activities which they could freely enjoy in the cities and towns. But in Rotuma these activities are severely frowned upon by the majority of the people. It is particularly difficult for an unmarried person to enjoy a satisfactory social life because relations between boys and girls are highly restricted. For those who are caught in such a position the conflict between progressiveness and conservatism is immediate and real. The forces of conservatism in this area are steadfast, however, and show few signs of changing. The frustration experienced by some of the young leaders who are caught in this situation is reflected in the statement of a young teacher in his life history:

"The older generations are holding fast to customs and culture--very reluctant to depart from them. And the younger generation's lives are sped up by modern influences. They are eager to disregard the old and adopt the new. In my opinion there is sort of a conflict between the two. Then comes the question, who is going to win? As an answer to that I feel that the younger generation is always aware of the older customs, and will never really oppose the beliefs and attitudes of the older generation. The people who belong to the younger generation gradually give way to the older folks. The only way a person can really stay progressive is to leave Rotuma. That is something that shouldn't happen. These old people should give in to the younger ones in some ways. An example is the

religious attitudes of the old folks. They cling to this notion that you shouldn't play sports on Sunday, or that you shouldn't go to dances. They tend to look down on us if we do these things. If they asked us, we would have something to say, and what we have to say would have been largely influenced by modern society."

In response to a question regarding his role as a teacher the same subject said:

"To begin with, I'm quite happy as a teacher. But I feel that to become a teacher in Rotuma places additional burdens on a person. In Rotuma people expect too much from a teacher with regard to his personal life. People expect you to be a moral leader as well, and if you don't work up to their expectations, they have a disregard for you. At the moment I don't take much notice of what they say, on the assumption that I have a private life to lead. But I think the longer I stay in Rotuma, the more I'll be influenced by Rotuman attitudes towards life, and will tend to fall back towards Rotuman ways."

Another conflict area is that of personal obligations in the social sphere. By the rules of Rotuman ethics the rich should give to the poor, and the strong should help the weak. For a man who is well-off to deprive his own relatives in times of need is an unpardonable sin, and since the island is so small, and kinship reckoned bilaterally, one is apt to be related to almost everyone. It is a Rotuman maxim that if you are poor you will have few relatives, but if you are rich you will have plenty, and people certainly seem to go through considerably more pains to trace their relationship to the wealthy. For the individual who has gone through a long period of training so that he could enhance his own and his immediate family's standard of living, being in Rotuma creates a double-bind. If he tries to save his money he will be despised and ridiculed; but if he submits to the pressures he will save nothing, and may even go into debt. One person interviewed who was caught in these circumstances asserted that if he were to stay in Rotuma he would be unable to afford to educate his children, so heavy was the drain on his finances.

But the majority of the emergent elite accepts the community's social conservatism, and they direct their efforts towards the common goal of raising the standard of living on the island. One such leader, whose prestige has been bolstered by an educational tour of the United Kingdom and India, is the most influential person on the island. His basic position is that of headmaster of one of the schools, but he is also the advisor and chief decision-maker of the Rotuma Co-operative Association, the circuit steward for the Methodist Church in Rotuma, and has recently been elected as his district's representative to the Rotuma Council of Chiefs. [25] His exceptional prestige accrues from his ability to combine the capacity for making decisions and accepting responsibility with the qualities of a "good man" by being outwardly modest (though not humble), unselfish and generous (he does everything aside from his main vocation without pay, including teaching a weekly book-keeping class for adults). Socially he is a conservative and has made persistent efforts to restrict the use of liquor on the island. He has also taken the official Methodist stand against European-style dancing and playing games on Sunday. He expresses his position as a desire "to bring the best of the European ways to Rotuma, but not to accept everything uncritically; and to retain that which is good in Rotuman culture".

In general, new ideas are greeted with suspicion, particularly if they conflict with customary Rotuman notions. An example is the attempt by some of the younger leaders to introduce sports requiring vigorous physical exercise, like rugby and soccer. According to the old folks such vigorous exertion is bad for people's health and is presumed to be a cause of tuberculosis. There was, therefore, a great deal of opposition by parents to their children participating in these games, and although they are now accepted, many of the more conservative people regard them with some misgiving.



Another example is the use of bandages to cover open sores. According to old Rotuman notions sores should be left uncovered and exposed to the air. If this is done, however, the flies quickly infect and spread them. The old people scoff at such an idea, and teachers complain that after they have spent a good deal of time and effort treating the children's sores, some parents remove the bandages and proceed to wash off the medication, replacing it with coconut oil, as soon as the children get home.

Nevertheless, new ideas do manage to pierce the screen of conservatism, slowly and undramatically, but steadily. Modern medicine has now gained fairly full acceptance, for instance, although some of the old magical remedies still survive. As one educated Rotuman put it, "Before, people used to try their own medicine first and if that did not work they would see the doctor. Now, they go to the doctor first and try their native medicines after."

One further example of the germination of an idea--and at present it is only in the germinating stage--is the technique of democratic decision-making. Voting has been used in some activities almost as long as there have been Europeans on the island, but for the most part people have voted in accordance with what they thought to be general opinion, rather than for what they believed to be correct. This appears to be changing, however slowly, partially as a result of education and partially because of the influence of the co-operative societies. Possibly in the near future the Rotumans will be capable of engaging in a genuine kind of democratic policy formation at the local level, which will reduce their dependency on authority for solving problems.

Basically, though, Rotuma still must be considered to be a conservative community. New ideas win acceptance slowly and old ideas die hard. The forces of conservatism are especially strong in the social sphere and those urbanized individuals who would attempt to live according to "modern" social standards may do so only at a heavy price

It is apparent, too, that the forces of conservatism are abetted by the drain of excessive population to Fiji. Those people who are ambitious, independent-minded and progressive are the first to leave Rotuma. Only the few who return to fill the limited number of roles that require education form the progressive element, and most of them prefer to fall in line with the conservatives rather than incur the disdain of the community.

Affiliation has increased the complexity of Rotuma's socio-cultural system. In short, the people on Rotuma are faced with many more, and much more diversified, problems to solve than were their ancestors; but they have at their disposal a whole battery of new principles and ideas with which to solve them. They are still in the process of sorting them out, trying to find which ones suit them best.

## **Conclusion**

Rotuma, though geographically isolated, is today very much a part of a larger social system--the Colony of Fiji, and with the latter, a part of the modern world. As a hinterland community it supplies the Colony's urban centres with talent, and ships its specialized product, copra, to Fiji's markets. In return it receives trained personnel to fill necessary roles, goods for better living, and specialized aid in the form of policies and advice from learned men.

Thus far the flow of people, goods and information has been slow enough, and limited enough, to permit the community to exercise a firm conservatism, and thereby maintain a high level of internal cohesion. But the question that suggests itself is, what will happen to the community when this flow is intensified? That it will intensify is a certainty, and only a question of time. As better and faster modes of transportation are made available the island's protective isolation will disappear, and new techniques of mass communication--television via satellites, for example--are bound to have an

effect.

The impending intensification of interaction will undoubtedly yield many advantages. Better education will be made available, and a higher standard of living. But community cohesion will surely be threatened. The danger area is that of social control, which is likely to be impaired by a rapid influx and departure of people. Thus even Rotuma, remote as it now is, may yet, in the not too distant future, have to deal with the same kinds of problems that plague only the Colony's cities and towns today.

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### Notes

[1] It was with deep regret that I learned of the death of Professor Felix Keesing, on the very day that the present article was completed. Dr. Keesing was my teacher and advisor throughout my post-graduate career and it was he who first interested me in Pacific anthropology. The notion of Pacific islands as hinterland communities was prominent in his recent thinking and I think it fitting that I should dedicate this, my first published article on the region that played such a big part in his professional career, to him as a way of expressing my admiration and appreciation. [\[return to text\]](#)

I wish to thank the United States Institute of Mental Health whose financial support made possible the research upon which this paper is based. Acknowledgment is also due to Irwin Howard who aided in the collection and tabulation of the demographic data used in the paper.

[2] Thompson 1915:64-66, 138-139. [\[return to text\]](#)

[3] Wilson 1799:292-294. [\[return to text\]](#)

[4] The concept of "urban" used in this paper has been derived from the census report of 1956 for the Colony of Fiji. Included are towns of legal status and certain adjacent areas. McArthur 1958:9. [\[return to text\]](#)

[5] Annual Report of the Resident Commissioner for the year 1886, Outward Letters, Rotuma District Office; Central Archives, Suva. [\[return to text\]](#)

[6] The Government Officer in charge of Rotuma was given the title "Resident Commissioner" until 1934 In 1935 the title was changed to "District Officer." [\[return to text\]](#)

[7] During the 1930's an American company was purchasing Rotuman copra, picking it up at the island on its return voyage to San Francisco, after calling at Fiji. [\[return to text\]](#)

[8] Residential histories were obtained by two Rotuman assistants for 1,076 subjects. Excluded from the tabulations are all subjects under the age of 20 years and subjects for whom the information is incomplete or contradictory. It is probable that what error does exist is due to information being left out. Therefore the table is probably weighted in the direction of fewer trips than have actually taken place. [\[return to text\]](#)

[9] Tables 1A and 1B are derived from the census reports for the Colony of Fiji for the years 1921, 1936, 1946 and 1956. [\[return to text\]](#)

[10] Included is time spent outside the Colony of Fiji. [\[return to text\]](#)

[11] McArthur 1958:57. [\[return to text\]](#)

[12] Bennett 1832:378. [\[return to text\]](#)

[13] Russell 1942:235. [\[return to text\]](#)

[14] Allardyce 1885-6:130-144. [\[return to text\]](#)

[15] Annual Report of the Resident Commissioner for the Year 1881, Outwards Letters, Rotuma District Office, Central Archives, Suva. [\[return to text\]](#)

[16] Dispatch from Resident Commissioner A. R. Mackay to Colonial Secretary, January 10th, 1887, Outwards Letters, Rotuma District Office; Central Archives, Suva. [\[return to text\]](#)

[17] Because of the island's isolation Rotuma has been placed under the Eastern administrative district instead of the northern one. The reason for this is that there is no direct channel of communication between the northern part of the Fiji group and Rotuma; all information being channeled through Suva. It is therefore considerably less trouble for the Commissioner, Eastern, who is stationed in Levuka, to administer Rotuma. [\[return to text\]](#)

[18] This man was a young Rotuman army officer in the Fiji Military Forces who took over as Acting District Officer while the regular District Officer, who is also a Rotuman, and an ex-school teacher, was on leave. [\[return to text\]](#)

[19] There are two active ministers in Rotuma, including the Circuit Superintendent. The island is divided into two sub-circuits, one under the supervision of the Circuit Superintendent and the other under the supervision of the other active minister. In addition there are three retired ministers who preach and assist the active ministers. All five of these men are Rotumans; it being a deliberate policy of the Methodist Church to place indigenous ministers in charge of their own ethnic groups. [\[return to text\]](#)

The Catholic Mission is separated into two parishes. The larger one has a European priest in charge and a Rotuman priest as an assistant. The smaller parish is in the hands of a single European priest. [\[return to text\]](#)

[20] I have used the phrase "European" clique not because the members are racially European, but because they are culturally comparatively so. During my stay on the island the clique was composed of the part-European managers of the two firms and their wives, three Indian tailors and some of the more Europeanized Rotumans. The only full European person on the island, aside from the European Catholic priests and nuns, is an Australian man who is married to a Rotuman woman and holds no official position. He is also a member of the clique. [\[return to text\]](#)

[21] Since I do not know of any Rotumans who belong to a non-Christian sect I presume the informant is referring to non-practising Christians. [\[return to text\]](#)

[22] Historique De La Station St. Michel Upu Rotuma. Unpublished manuscript. Translated from the French by Irwin Howard. [\[return to text\]](#)

[23] The Rotumans customarily drink **kava** only on ceremonial occasions. [\[return to text\]](#)

[24] People succeed to chiefly titles in Rotuma by unrestricted bilateral descent. It is therefore quite easy for almost everyone to trace his heritage to at least one of the seven paramount chiefs. During



my stay on the island a new paramount chief was selected in one of the districts. Fully half of the men in the district could trace their ancestry to the chiefly family. Others were doubtlessly eligible for chieftainship of other districts. Thus the selection of men to fill these positions is pretty much a democratic affair. In the election which I witnessed four men were nominated and a secret ballot taken. The margin of victory was only two out of a total of forty-five votes. [\[return to text\]](#)

[25] In 1958 a new Ordinance was passed providing that the Rotuma Council of Chiefs include one elected representative from each District in addition to the hereditary Chiefs, who are still chosen in the traditional manner. The composition of the first group of elected representatives is of some interest. It included two school teachers, an independent businessman a Methodist catechist, a lesser government employee, a returned serviceman who is a carpenter by profession and a man who has spent nine years in Fiji and whose brother is the best educated Rotuman (holding an M.A degree from a New Zealand University). [\[return to text\]](#)

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